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UNIVERSITY
BELFAST**

Oscar Wilde at Home

Grant, D. (Other). (2015). Oscar Wilde at Home. Performance

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AT HOME WITH OSCAR WILDE

Compiled from the works of Oscar Wilde by David Grant

PROLOGUE (Main Entrance Hall)

Oscar, Constance, Speranza and Bosie await their guests on the stairs of the main entranceway. Once they are assembled Oscar descends a few steps to address them

OSCAR: Dear friends, welcome, welcome to our humble home. Constance and I deem ourselves privileged to receive you – a sentiment with which I am sure you will steadfastly degree Mama. Before Bosie conducts you to the Drawing Room/Study pray indulge me long enough to say just this by way of introduction.

The artist is the creator of beautiful things. To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim. Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault. Those who find beautiful meanings in beautiful things are the cultivated. For these there is hope. They are the elect to whom beautiful things mean only beauty. There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all. All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril. It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.

Let us commence...

SCENE 1 (Drawing Room)

Lady Windermere is arranging flowers by the table between the windows.

Parker. Is your ladyship at home this afternoon?

Lady Windermere. Yes—who has called?

Parker. Lord Darlington, my lady.

Lady Windermere. *[hesitates for a moment.]* Show him up.

Parker. Yes, my lady.

She moves to the fireplace

Parker. Lord Darlington,

Lord Darlington. How do you do, Lady Windermere?

Lady Windermere. How do you do, lord Darlington? No, I can't shake hands with you. My hands are all wet with these roses. Aren't they lovely?

Lord Darlington. They are quite perfect. And what a wonderful fan! May I look at it?

Lady Windermere. Do. Pretty, isn't it! It's got my name on it, and everything. I have only just seen it myself. It's my husband's birthday present to me. You know to-day is my birthday?

Lord Darlington. No? Is it really?

Lady Windermere. Yes, I'm of age to-day. Quite an important day in my life, isn't it? That is why I am giving this party to-night. ~~Do sit down.~~

Lord Darlington. I wish I had known it was your birthday, Lady Windermere. I would have covered the whole street in front of your house with flowers for you to walk on. They are made for you.

[a short pause.]

Lady Windermere. Lord Darlington, you annoyed me last night at the foreign office. I am afraid you are going to annoy me again.

Lord Darlington. I am quite miserable, Lady Windermere. You must tell me what I did.

Lady Windermere. Well, you kept paying me elaborate compliments the whole evening.

Lord Darlington. Ah, nowadays we are all of us so hard up, that the only pleasant things to pay are compliments. They're the only things we can pay.

Lady Windermere. No, I am talking very seriously. You mustn't laugh, I am quite serious. I don't like compliments, and I don't see why a man should think he is pleasing a woman enormously when he says to her a whole heap of things that he doesn't mean.

Lord Darlington. Ah, but I did mean them.

Lady Windermere. I hope not. Don't you want the world to take you seriously, Lord Darlington?

Lord Darlington. No, not the world. I should like you to take me very seriously, Lady Windermere, you more than any one else in life.

Lady Windermere. Why—why me?

Lord Darlington. Because I think we might be great friends. Let us be great friends. You may want a friend some day.

Lady Windermere. Why do you say that?

Lord Darlington. Oh!—we all want friends at times.

Lady Windermere. I think we're very good friends already, Lord Darlington. We can always remain so as long as you don't—

Lord Darlington. Don't what?

Lady Windermere. Don't spoil it by saying extravagant silly things to me. You think I am a puritan, I suppose? Well, I have something of the puritan in me. I was brought up like that.

Lord Darlington. My dear Lady Windermere!

Lady Windermere. You look on me as being behind the age.—well, I am! I should be sorry to be on the same level as an age like this.

Lord Darlington. You think the age very bad?

Lady Windermere. Yes. Nowadays people seem to look on life as a speculation. It is not a speculation. It is a sacrament. Its ideal is love. Its purification is sacrifice.

Lord Darlington. Oh, anything is better than being sacrificed!

Lady Windermere. Don't say that.

Lord Darlington. I do say it. I feel it—I know it.

Lord Darlington. Do you think then—of course I am only putting an imaginary instance—do you think that in the case of a young married couple, say about two years married, if the husband suddenly becomes the intimate friend of a woman of—well, more than doubtful character—is always calling upon her, lunching with her, and probably paying her bills—do you think that the wife should not console herself?

Lady Windermere. Console herself?

Lord Darlington. Yes, I think she should—I think she has the right.

Lady Windermere. Because the husband is vile—should the wife be vile also?

Lord Darlington. Vileness is a terrible word, Lady Windermere.

Lady Windermere. It is a terrible thing, Lord Darlington.

Lord Darlington. Do you know I am afraid that good people do a great deal of harm in this world. And I must say I think you are very hard on modern life, Lady Windermere. Do you think seriously that women who have committed what the world calls a fault should never be forgiven?

Lady Windermere. I think they should never be forgiven.

Lord Darlington. And men? Do you think that there should be the same laws for men as there are for women?

Lady Windermere. Certainly!

Lord Darlington. I think life too complex a thing to be settled by these hard and fast rules.

Lady Windermere. If we had 'these hard and fast rules,' we should find life much more simple.

Lord Darlington. You allow of no exceptions?

Lady Windermere. None!

Lord Darlington. Ah, what a fascinating puritan you are, Lady Windermere!

Lady Windermere. The adjective was unnecessary, Lord Darlington.

Lord Darlington. I couldn't help it. I can resist everything except temptation.

Actors freeze. Audience is conducted to the next room.

SCENE 2 (Dining Room)

Oscar and Constance sit at either end of the dining table, Constance nearer the door, Bosie at Oscar's side. The dialogue is recorded and each voice is represented by an individual loudspeaker positioned on chairs around the dining table.

W1 I don't know what society is coming to. The most dreadful people seem to go everywhere. They certainly come to my parties—the men get quite furious if one doesn't ask them. Really, some one should make a stand against it.

M. What I want to know is this. Who is she? Where does she come from? Why hasn't she got any demmed relations? Demmed nuisance, relations! But they make one so demmed respectable.

W2 That horrid woman. She dresses so well, too, which makes it much worse, sets such a dreadful example. My disreputable brother—such a trial to us all—is completely infatuated about her.

W3 No, no tea, thank you, dear. We have just had tea at Lady Markby's. Such bad tea, too. It was quite undrinkable. I wasn't at all surprised. Her own son-in-law supplies it!

M. Look here, dear boy. I don't know what to do about Mrs. Erlynne. Egad! I might be married to her; she treats me with such demmed indifference. She's deuced clever, too! She explains everything. Egad! She explains you. She has got any amount of explanations for you—and all of them different.

W3 It is quite scandalous, for she is absolutely inadmissible into society. Many a woman has a past, but I am told that she has at least a dozen, and that they all fit.

W2 Only last night at dear Lady Jansen's every one was saying how extraordinary it was that, of all men in London, Windermere should behave in such a way.

W1 He goes to see her continually, and stops for hours at a time, and while he is there she is not at home to any one. Not that many ladies call on her, dear, but she has a great many disreputable men friends and that is what makes it so dreadful about Windermere. We looked upon him as being such a model husband, but I am afraid there is no doubt about it.

M. I have been dining with Arabella this evening! By Jove! you should have heard what she said about Mrs. Erlynne. She didn't leave a rag on her. . . . Berwick and I told her that didn't matter much, as the lady in question must have an extremely fine figure. You should have seen Arabella's expression! . . .

W2 My dear nieces—you know the Saville girls, don't you?—such nice domestic creatures—plain, dreadfully plain, but so good—well, they're always at the window doing fancy work, and making ugly things for the poor, which I think so useful of them in these dreadful socialistic days, and this terrible woman has taken a house in Curzon Street, right opposite them—such a respectable street, too!

W3 I don't know what we're coming to! And they tell me that Windermere goes there four and five times a week—they see him. They can't help it—and although they never talk scandal, they—well, of course—they remark on it to every one.

W1 And the worst of it all is that I have been told that this woman has got a great deal of money out of somebody, for it seems that she came to London six months ago without anything at all to speak of, and now she has this charming house in Mayfair, drives her ponies in the Park every afternoon and all—well, all—since she has known poor dear Windermere.

Once established the gossip grows in volume, with track layered over track. Oscar, Constance and Bosie remain impassive throughout.

SCENE 3 (Library)

Lane. Mr. Ernest Worthing.

Algernon. How are you, my dear Ernest? Where have you been since last Thursday?

Jack. In the country. Who is coming to tea?

Algernon. Oh! merely Aunt Augusta and Gwendolen.

Jack. How perfectly delightful! I have come up to town expressly to propose to Gwendolen.

Algernon. Yes, that is all very well; but I am afraid Aunt Augusta won't quite approve.

Jack. But I am in love with Gwendolen.

Algernon. My dear fellow, Gwendolen is my first cousin. And before I allow you to marry her, you will have to clear up the whole question of Cecily.

Jack. Cecily! What on earth do you mean? What do you mean, Algy, by Cecily! I don't know any one of the name of Cecily.

Algernon. Bring me that cigarette case Mr. Worthing left in the smoking-room the last time he dined here.

Lane. Yes, sir.

Jack. Do you mean to say you have had my cigarette case all this time?

Algernon. It makes no matter, for, now that I look at the inscription inside, I find that the thing isn't yours after all.

Jack. Of course it's mine. You have seen me with it a hundred times, and you have no right whatsoever to read what is written inside. It is a very ungentlemanly thing to read a private cigarette case.

Algernon. Yes; but this isn't your cigarette case. This cigarette case is a present from some one of the name of Cecily, and you said you didn't know any one of that name.

Jack. Well, if you want to know, Cecily happens to be my aunt.

Algernon. Your aunt!

Jack. Yes. Charming old lady she is, too. Lives at Tunbridge Wells. Just give it back to me, Algy.

Algernon. But why does she call herself little Cecily. 'From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack.' There is no objection, I admit, to an aunt being a small aunt, but why an aunt, no matter what her size may be, should call her own nephew her uncle, I can't quite make out. Besides, your name isn't Jack at all; it is Ernest.

Jack. Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country, and the cigarette case was given to me in the country.

Algernon. Yes, but that does not account for the fact that your small Aunt Cecily calls you her dear uncle. Now, go on! Tell me the whole thing. I may mention that I have always suspected you of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist; and I am quite sure of it now.

Jack. Bunburyist? What on earth do you mean by a Bunburyist?

Algernon. I'll reveal to you the meaning of that incomparable expression as soon as you are kind enough to inform me why you are Ernest in town and Jack in the country.

Jack. My dear fellow, there is nothing improbable about my explanation at all. In fact it's perfectly ordinary. Old Mr. Thomas Cardew, who adopted me when I was a little boy, made me in his will guardian to his grand-daughter, Miss Cecily Cardew.

Algernon. But why are you Ernest in town and Jack in the country?

Jack. My dear Algy, When one is placed in the position of guardian, one has to adopt a very high moral tone, so ~~which can hardly be said to conduce very much to either one's health or one's happiness~~, in order to get up to town I have always pretended to have a younger brother of the name of Ernest. That, my dear Algy, is the whole truth pure and simple.

Algernon. The truth is rarely pure and never simple. What you really are is a Bunburyist. . You are one of the most advanced Bunburyists I know.

Jack. What on earth do you mean?

Algernon. You have invented a very useful younger brother called Ernest, in order that you may be able to come up to town as often as you like. I have invented an invaluable permanent invalid called Bunbury, in order that I may be able to go down into the country whenever I choose. Bunbury is perfectly invaluable.

Jack. I'm not a Bunburyist at all. If Gwendolen accepts me, I am going to kill my brother, indeed I think I'll kill him in any case. Cecily is a little too much interested in him. So I am going to get rid of Ernest. And I strongly advise you to do the same with Mr. . . with your invalid friend who has the absurd name.

Algernon. Nothing will induce me to part with Bunbury, and if you ever get married, which seems to me extremely problematic, you will be very glad to know Bunbury. A man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it.

Jack. ~~That is nonsense. If I marry a charming girl like Gwendolen, I certainly won't want to know Bunbury.~~

They freeze

SCENE 4 (Drawing Room)

Lady Windermere. How horrible! I understand now what Lord Darlington meant by the imaginary instance of the couple not two years married. Oh! it can't be true—she spoke of enormous sums of money paid to this woman. No, it is some hideous mistake. Some silly scandal! He loves me! He loves me! But why should I not look? I am his wife, I have a right to look! 'Mrs. Erlynne—£600—Mrs. Erlynne—£700—Mrs. Erlynne—£400.' Oh! it is true! It is true! How horrible!

[Enter Lord Windermere C.]

Lord Windermere. Well, dear, has the fan been sent home yet? Margaret, you have opened my bank book. You have no right to do such a thing!

Lady Windermere. You think it wrong that you are found out, don't you?

Lord Windermere. I think it wrong that a wife should spy on her husband.

Lady Windermere. I did not spy on you. I never knew of this woman's existence till half an hour ago. Some one who pitied me was kind enough to tell me what every one in London knows already—your daily visits to Curzon Street, your mad infatuation, the monstrous sums of money you squander on this infamous woman!

Lord Windermere. Margaret! don't talk like that of Mrs. Erlynne, you don't know how unjust it is!

Lady Windermere. You are very jealous of Mrs. Erlynne's honour. I wish you had been as jealous of mine.

Lord Windermere. Your honour is untouched, Margaret. I never loved any one in the whole world but you.

Lady Windermere. Who is this woman, then?

Lord Windermere. Mrs. Erlynne was once honoured, loved, respected. She was well born, she had position—she lost everything—threw it away, if you like. That makes it all the more bitter. Misfortunes one can endure—they come from outside, they are accidents. But to suffer for one's own faults—ah!—there is the sting of life. It was twenty years ago, too. She was little more than a girl then. She had been a wife for even less time than you have.

Lady Windermere. I am not interested in her—and—you should not mention this woman and me in the same breath. It is an error of taste.

Lord Windermere. Margaret, you could save this woman. She wants to get back into society, and she wants you to help her.

Lady Windermere. Me!

Lord Windermere. Yes, you.

Lady Windermere. How impertinent of her!

Lord Windermere. Margaret, I came to ask you a great favour, and I still ask it of you, though you have discovered what I had intended you should never have known that I have given Mrs. Erlynne a large sum of money. I want you to send her an invitation for our party to-night.

Lady Windermere. You are mad!

Lord Windermere. I entreat you. People may chatter about her, do chatter about her, of course, but they don't know anything definite against her. She has been to several

houses—not to houses where you would go, I admit, but still to houses where women who are in what is called Society nowadays do go. That does not content her. She wants you to receive her once.

Lady Windermere. As a triumph for her, I suppose?

Lord Windermere. No; but because she knows that you are a good woman—and that if she comes here once she will have a chance of a happier, a surer life than she has had. Won't you help a woman who is trying to get back?

Lady Windermere. No! If a woman really repents, she never wishes to return to the society that has made or seen her ruin.

Lord Windermere. I beg of you.

Lady Windermere. I shall do nothing of the kind.

Lord Windermere. You refuse?

Lady Windermere. Absolutely!

Lord Windermere. Ah, Margaret, do this for my sake; it is her last chance.

Lady Windermere. What has that to do with me?

Lord Windermere. How hard good women are!

Lady Windermere. How weak bad men are!

Lord Windermere. Margaret, none of us men may be good enough for the women we marry—that is quite true—but you don't imagine I would ever—oh, the suggestion is monstrous!

Lady Windermere. Why should you be different from other men? I am told that there is hardly a husband in London who does not waste his life over some shameful passion.

Lord Windermere. I am not one of them.

Lady Windermere. I am not sure of that!

Lord Windermere. You are sure in your heart. But don't make chasm after chasm between us. God knows the last few minutes have thrust us wide enough apart.

Lady Windermere. Arthur, if that woman comes here, I shall insult her.

Lord Windermere. Margaret, you couldn't do such a thing.

Lady Windermere. You don't know me!

Lord Windermere. Margaret, you'll ruin us!

Lady Windermere. Us! From this moment my life is separate from yours. But if you wish to avoid a public scandal, write at once to this woman, and tell her that I forbid her to come here!

Lord Windermere. I will not—I cannot—she must come!

Lady Windermere. Then I shall do exactly as I have said. You leave me no choice.

Lord Windermere. Margaret! Margaret!

Lady Windermere exits

[A pause.] My God! What shall I do? I dare not tell her who this woman really is. The shame would kill her.

SCENE 5 (Dining Room)

Dorian poses at the far end of the room for Basil while Harry (played by Oscar) looks on admiringly.

Basil Just turn your head a little more to the right, Dorian, like a good boy.

Harry My dear fellow, I congratulate you most warmly. It is the finest portrait of modern times. Why on earth won't you exhibit this extraordinary portrait of Dorian Gray?

Basil *(under his breath)* Because, there is too much of myself in the thing, Harry—too much of myself!

Harry Mr. Gray, come over and look at yourself.

Dorian Is it really finished?

Basil Don't you like it?

Harry Of course he likes it. Who wouldn't like it? It is one of the greatest things in modern art.

Dorian How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young. If it were only the other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that—for that—I would give everything! I would give my soul for that! I am jealous of everything whose beauty does not die. Why should it keep what I must lose? Oh, if it were only the other way! If the picture could change, and I could be always what I am now! *(Impetuously)* Why did you paint it? It will mock me some day—mock me horribly! I should like to come to the theatre with you, Lord Henry.

Harry Then you shall come; and you will come, too, Basil, won't you?

Basil I can't, really. I would sooner not. I have a lot of work to do.

Harry Well, then, you and I will go alone, Mr. Gray.

Basil Don't go to the theatre to-night, Dorian. Stop and dine with me.

Dorian I can't, Basil.

Basil Why?

Dorian Because I have promised Lord Henry to go with him.

Basil Very well. But come and see me soon. Come to-morrow.

Dorian Certainly.

Basil You won't forget?

Dorian No, of course not

Basil I trust you.

Harry I wish I could trust myself. Come, Mr. Gray, my hansom is outside, and I can drop you at your own place and collect you before the theatre. Good-bye, Basil. It has been a most interesting afternoon.

Harry and Basil retire behind a screen.

Dorian becomes aware of a presence at the other end of the room.

Dorian How late you are, Harry!

Victoria I am afraid it is not Harry, Mr. Gray.

Dorian I beg your pardon. I thought—

Victoria You thought it was my husband. It is only his wife. You must let me introduce myself. I know you quite well by your photographs. I think my husband has got seventeen of them.

Dorian Not seventeen, Lady Henry?

Victoria Well, eighteen, then. And I saw you with him the other night at the opera.

Dorian That was at Lohengrin, Lady Henry, I think?

Victoria Yes; it was at dear Lohengrin. I like Wagner's music better than anybody's. It is so loud that one can talk the whole time without other people hearing what one says. That is a great advantage, don't you think so, Mr. Gray?

Dorian I am afraid I don't think so, Lady Henry. I never talk during music—at least, during good music. If one hears bad music, it is one's duty to drown it in conversation.

Victoria Ah! that is one of Harry's views, isn't it, Mr. Gray? I always hear Harry's views from his friends. It is the only way I get to know of them.

Harry re-enters from behind screen

 But here is Harry! Harry, I came in to look for you, to ask you something—I forget what it was—and I found Mr. Gray here. He has been most pleasant. I am so glad to have seen him.

Harry I am charmed, my love, quite charmed. So sorry I am late, Dorian. I went to look after a piece of old brocade in Wardour Street and had to bargain for hours for it. Nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Victoria I am afraid I must be going. Good-bye, Mr. Gray. Good-bye, Harry. You are dining out, I suppose?

Harry I dare say, my dear. Never marry a woman with straw-coloured hair, Dorian.

Dorian I don't think I am likely to marry, Harry. I am too much in love. That is one of your aphorisms. I am putting it into practice, as I do everything that you say.

SCENE 6 (Study)

Lady Bracknell is seated near the fireplace. Jack stands.

Lady Bracknell. You can take a seat, Mr. Worthing.

Jack. Thank you, Lady Bracknell, I prefer standing.

Lady Bracknell. I feel bound to tell you that you are not down on my list of eligible young men, However, I am quite ready to enter your name, should your answers be what a really affectionate mother requires. Do you smoke?

Jack. Well, yes, I must admit I smoke.

Lady Bracknell. I am glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind. There are far too many idle men in London as it is. How old are you?

Jack. Twenty-nine.

Lady Bracknell. A very good age to be married at. I have always been of the opinion that a man who desires to get married should know either everything or nothing. Which do you know?

Jack. I know nothing, Lady Bracknell.

Lady Bracknell. I am pleased to hear it. I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone. What is your income?

Jack. Between seven and eight thousand a year.

Lady Bracknell. In land, or in investments?

Jack. In investments, chiefly. I have a country house with some land, of course, attached to it; but I don't depend on that for my real income.

Lady Bracknell. A country house! How many bedrooms? Well, that point can be cleared up afterwards. You have a town house, I hope? A girl with a simple, unspoiled nature, like Gwendolen, could hardly be expected to reside in the country.

Jack. Well, I own a house in Belgrave Square.

Lady Bracknell. What number in Belgrave Square?

Jack. 149.

Lady Bracknell. The unfashionable side. I thought there was something. Now to minor matters. Are your parents living?

Jack. I have lost both my parents.

Lady Bracknell. To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness. Who was your father? He was evidently a man of some wealth.

Jack. I am afraid I really don't know. The fact is, Lady Bracknell, I said I had lost my parents. It would be nearer the truth to say that my parents seem to have lost me . . . I don't actually know who I am by birth. I was . . . well, I was found.

Lady Bracknell. Found!

Jack. The late Mr. Thomas Cardew, an old gentleman of a very charitable and kindly disposition, found me, and gave me the name of Worthing, because he happened to have a first-class ticket for Worthing in his pocket at the time. Worthing is a place in Sussex. It is a seaside resort.

Lady Bracknell. Where did the charitable gentleman who had a first-class ticket for this seaside resort find you?

Jack. [Gravely.] In a hand-bag.

Lady Bracknell. A hand-bag?

Jack. *[Very seriously.]* Yes, Lady Bracknell. I was in a hand-bag—a somewhat large, black leather hand-bag, with handles to it—an ordinary hand-bag in fact.

Lady Bracknell. In what *locality* did this Mr. Thomas, Cardew come across this ordinary hand-bag?

Jack. In the cloak-room at Victoria Station. It was given to him in mistake for his own.

Lady Bracknell. The cloak-room at Victoria Station?

Jack. Yes. The Brighton line.

Lady Bracknell. The line is immaterial. Mr. Worthing, I confess I feel somewhat bewildered by what you have just told me. To be born, or at any rate bred, in a hand-bag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that reminds one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution. And I presume you know what that unfortunate movement led to? As for the particular locality in which the hand-bag was found, a cloak-room at a railway station might serve to conceal a social indiscretion—has probably, indeed, been used for that purpose before now—but it could hardly be regarded as an assured basis for a recognised position in good society.

Jack. May I ask you then what you would advise me to do?

Lady Bracknell. Me, sir! What has it to do with me? You can hardly imagine that I and Lord Bracknell would dream of allowing our only daughter—a girl brought up with the utmost care—to marry into a cloak-room, and form an alliance with a parcel? Good morning, Mr. Worthing!

She sweeps out

SCENE 7 (Bedroom)

Lady Windermere. Why doesn't Lord Darlington come? This waiting is horrible. He should be here. Why is he not here, to wake by passionate words some fire within me? I am cold—cold as a loveless thing. Arthur must have read my letter by this time. If he cared for me, he would have come after me, would have taken me back by force. But he doesn't care. He's entrammelled by this woman—fascinated by her—dominated by her. Lord Darlington leaves England tomorrow. I will go with him—I have no choice. Mrs Erlynne!

Mrs. Erlynne. Lady Windermere! Thank Heaven I am in time. You must go back to your husband's house immediately.

Lady Windermere. Must?

Mrs. Erlynne. Yes, you must! There is not a second to be lost. Lord Darlington may return at any moment.

Lady Windermere. Don't come near me! I know why you are here. My husband sent you to lure me back that I might serve as a blind to whatever relations exist between you and him.

Mrs. Erlynne. Lady Windermere, you wrong me horribly—you wrong your husband horribly. He doesn't know you are here—he thinks you are safe in your own house. He thinks you are asleep in your own room. He never read the mad letter you wrote to him!

Lady Windermere. If my husband didn't read my letter, how is it that you are here? My husband told you, and sent you to decoy me back.

Mrs. Erlynne. Your husband has never seen the letter. I—saw it, I opened it. I—read it.

Lady Windermere. You opened a letter of mine to my husband? You wouldn't dare!

Mrs. Erlynne. Dare! Oh! to save you from the abyss into which you are falling, there is nothing in the world I would not dare, nothing in the whole world. Here is the letter. Your husband has never read it. He never shall read it. It should never have been written. Think as you like about me—say what you choose against me, but go back, go back to the husband you love.

Lady Windermere. I do not love him!

Mrs. Erlynne. Lady Windermere, Lady Windermere, don't say such terrible things. You don't know how terrible they are, how terrible and how unjust. The money that he gave me, he gave me not through love, but through hatred, not in worship, but in contempt. The hold I have over him—

Lady Windermere. Ah! you admit you have a hold!

Mrs. Erlynne. Yes, and I will tell you what it is. It is his love for you, Lady Windermere.

Lady Windermere. You expect me to believe that?

Mrs. Erlynne. You must believe it! It is true. It is his love for you that has made him submit to—oh! call it what you like, tyranny, threats, anything you choose. But it is his love for you. His desire to spare you—shame, yes, shame and disgrace.

Lady Windermere. What do you mean? You are insolent! What have I to do with you?

Mrs. Erlynne. Nothing. I know it—but I tell you that your husband loves you, Lady Windermere, before Heaven your husband is guiltless of all offence towards you! And I—I tell you that had it ever occurred to me that such a monstrous

suspicion would have entered your mind, I would have died rather than have crossed your life or his—oh! died, gladly died!

Lady Windermere. You talk as if you had a heart. Women like you have no hearts. Heart is not in you. You are bought and sold.

Mrs. Erlynne. Believe what you choose about me. I am not worth a moment's sorrow. But don't spoil your beautiful young life on my account! You don't know what may be in store for you, unless you leave this house at once. You don't know what it is to fall into the pit, to be despised, mocked, abandoned, sneered at—to be an outcast! to find the door shut against one, afraid every moment lest the mask should be stripped from one's face, and all the while to hear the laughter, the horrible laughter of the world, a thing more tragic than all the tears the world has ever shed. One pays for one's sin, and then one pays again, and all one's life one pays. You must never know that. I may have wrecked my own life, but I will not let you wreck yours. You—why, you are a mere girl, you would be lost. You haven't got the kind of brains that enables a woman to get back. You have neither the wit nor the courage. You couldn't stand dishonour! No! Go back, Lady Windermere, to the husband who loves you, whom you love. You have a child, Lady Windermere. Go back to that child who even now, in pain or in joy, may be calling to you. God gave you that child. Your place is with your child.

Lady Windermere. Take me home. Take me home.

[They exit rapidly]

SCENE 8 (Servants Stairs)

Dorian appears from the back room, followed by Basil

Basil My dear boy, what nonsense! Do you mean to say you don't like what I did of you? Where is it? Let me look at it. It is the best thing I have ever done.

Dorian Basil, you must not look at it. I don't wish you to.

Basil Not look at my own work! You are not serious. Why shouldn't I look at it?

Dorian If you try to look at it, Basil, on my word of honour I will never speak to you again as long as I live. I am quite serious. I don't offer any explanation, and you are not to ask for any. But, remember, if you make any attempt to see it, everything is over between us.

Basil Dorian!

Dorian Don't speak!

Basil But what is the matter? Of course I won't look at it if you don't want me to. But, really, it seems rather absurd that I shouldn't see my own work, especially as I am going to exhibit it in Paris in the autumn. I shall probably have to give it another coat of varnish before that, so I must see it some day, and why not to-day?

Dorian To exhibit it! You want to exhibit it?

Basil Yes; I don't suppose you will object to that. The portrait will only be away a month. I should think you could easily spare it for that time.

Dorian Basil, we have each of us a secret. Let me know yours, and I shall tell you mine. What was your reason for refusing to exhibit my picture?

Basil If I told you, you might like me less than you do, and you would certainly laugh at me. I could not bear your doing either of those two things. If you wish me never to look at your picture again, I am content. I have always you to look at. If you wish the best work I have ever done to be hidden from the world, I am satisfied. Your friendship is dearer to me than any fame or reputation.

Dorian No, Basil, you must tell me, I think I have a right to know.

Basil Just answer me one question, Dorian. Have you noticed in the picture something curious?—something that probably at first did not strike you, but that revealed itself to you suddenly?

Dorian I saw something in it, something that seemed to me very curious.

Basil Well, you don't mind my looking at the thing now?

Dorian You must not ask me that, Basil. I could not possibly let you stand in front of that picture.

Basil You will some day, surely?

Dorian Never.

He runs down the stairs. Basil follows slowly afterwards

SCENE 9 (Venetian Room)

Algernon. You are my little cousin Cecily, I'm sure.

Cecily. You are under some strange mistake. I am not little. In fact, I believe I am more than usually tall for my age. But I am your cousin Cecily. You, I see from your card, are Uncle Jack's brother, my cousin Ernest, my wicked cousin Ernest.

Algernon I hope, Cecily, I shall not offend you if I state quite frankly and openly that you seem to me to be in every way the visible personification of absolute perfection.

Cecily. I think your frankness does you great credit, Ernest. If you will allow me, I will copy your remarks into my diary.

Algernon. Do you really keep a diary? I'd give anything to look at it. May I?

Cecily. Oh no. You see, it is simply a very young girl's record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication. When it appears in volume form I hope you will order a copy. But pray, Ernest, don't stop. I delight in taking down from dictation. I have reached 'absolute perfection'. You can go on. I am quite ready for more.

Algernon. Cecily, ever since I first looked upon your wonderful and incomparable beauty, I have dared to love you wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly.

Cecily. I don't think that you should tell me that you love me wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly. Hopelessly doesn't seem to make much sense, does it?

Algernon. I love you, Cecily. You will marry me, won't you?

Cecily. You silly boy! Of course. Why, we have been engaged for the last three months.

Algernon. For the last three months?

Cecily. Yes, it will be exactly three months on Thursday.

Algernon. But how did we become engaged?

Cecily. Well, ever since dear Uncle Jack first confessed to us that he had a younger brother who was very wicked and bad, you of course have formed my chief topic of conversation. And of course a man who is much talked about is always very attractive. One feels there must be something in him, after all. I daresay it was foolish of me, but I fell in love with you, Ernest.

Algernon. Darling! And when was the engagement actually settled?

Cecily. On the 14th of February last. Worn out by your entire ignorance of my existence, I determined to end the matter one way or the other, and after a long struggle with myself I accepted you and bought this little ring in your name, and this is the little bangle with the true lover's knot I promised you always to wear.

Algernon. Did I give you this? It's very pretty, isn't it?

Cecily. Yes, you've wonderfully good taste, Ernest. It's the excuse I've always given for your leading such a bad life. And this is the box in which I keep all your dear letters.

Algernon. My letters! But, my own sweet Cecily, I have never written you any letters.

Cecily. You need hardly remind me of that, Ernest. I remember only too well that I was forced to write your letters for you. I wrote always three times a week, and sometimes oftener.

Algernon. Oh, do let me read them, Cecily?

Cecily. Oh, I couldn't possibly. They would make you far too conceited. [Replaces box.] The three you wrote me after I had broken off the engagement are so beautiful, and so badly spelled, that even now I can hardly read them without crying a little.

Algernon. But was our engagement ever broken off?

Cecily. Of course it was. On the 22nd of last March. You can see the entry if you like. [*Shows diary.*] 'To-day I broke off my engagement with Ernest. I feel it is better to do so. The weather still continues charming.'

Algernon. But why on earth did you break it off? What had I done? I had done nothing at all. Cecily, I am very much hurt indeed to hear you broke it off. Particularly when the weather was so charming.

Cecily. I don't think I could break it off now that I have actually met you. Besides, of course, there is the question of your name.

Algernon. Yes, of course.

Cecily. You must not laugh at me, darling, but it had always been a girlish dream of mine to love some one whose name was Ernest.

Algernon. But, my dear child, do you mean to say you could not love me if I had some other name?

Cecily. I might respect you, Ernest, I might admire your character, but I fear that I should not be able to give you my undivided attention.

Algernon. Ahem! Cecily! Your Rector here is, I suppose, thoroughly experienced in the practice of all the rites and ceremonials of the Church?

Cecily. Oh, yes.

Algernon. I must see him at once on a most important christening—I mean on most important business.

Cecily. Oh!

Algernon. I'll be back in no time. *[Kisses her and rushes out.]*

Cecily. What an impetuous boy he is! I like his hair so much. I must enter his proposal in my diary.

SCENE 10 (Venetian Room)

Gwendolen. I may call you Cecily, may I not?

Cecily. With pleasure!

Gwendolen. And you will always call me Gwendolen, won't you?

Cecily. If you wish.

Gwendolen. Then that is all quite settled, is it not?

Cecily. I hope so.

Gwendolen. Cecily, mamma, whose views on education are remarkably strict, has brought me up to be extremely short-sighted; it is part of her system; so do you mind my looking at you through my glasses?

Cecily. Oh! not at all, Gwendolen. I am very fond of being looked at.

Gwendolen. You are here on a short visit, I suppose.

Cecily. Oh no! I live here. Yes, I am Mr. Worthing's ward.

Gwendolen. Oh! It is strange he never mentioned to me that he had a ward. How secretive of him! I am not sure, however, that the news inspires me with feelings of unmixed delight. I am very fond of you, Cecily; I have liked you ever since I met you! But I am bound to state that now that I know that you are Mr. Worthing's ward, I cannot help expressing a wish you were—well, just a little older than you seem to be—and not quite so very alluring in appearance. In fact, if I may speak candidly—

Cecily. Pray do! I think that whenever one has anything unpleasant to say, one should always be quite candid.

Gwendolen. Well, to speak with perfect candour, Cecily, I wish that you were fully forty-two, and more than usually plain for your age. Ernest has a strong upright nature. He is the very soul of truth and honour. But even men of the noblest possible moral character are extremely susceptible to the influence of the physical charms of others.

Cecily. I beg your pardon, Gwendolen, did you say Ernest?

Gwendolen. Yes.

Cecily. Oh, but it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is my guardian. It is his brother—his elder brother.

Gwendolen. Ernest never mentioned to me that he had a brother.

Cecily. I am sorry to say they have not been on good terms for a long time.

Gwendolen. Ah! that accounts for it. And now that I think of it I have never heard any man mention his brother. The subject seems distasteful to most men. Cecily, you have lifted a load from my mind. I was growing almost anxious. It would have been terrible if any cloud had come across a friendship like ours, would it not? Of course you are quite, quite sure that it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is your guardian?

Cecily. Quite sure. *[A pause.]* In fact, I am going to be his.

Gwendolen. I beg your pardon?

Cecily. Dearest Gwendolen, there is no reason why I should make a secret of it to you. Our little county newspaper is sure to chronicle the fact next week. Mr. Ernest Worthing and I are engaged to be married.

Gwendolen. My darling Cecily, I think there must be some slight error. Mr. Ernest Worthing is engaged to me. The announcement will appear in the Morning Post on Saturday at the latest.

Cecily. I am afraid you must be under some misconception. Ernest proposed to me exactly ten minutes ago. *[Shows diary.]*

Gwendolen. It is certainly very curious, for he asked me to be his wife yesterday afternoon at 5.30. If you would care to verify the incident, pray do so. *[Produces diary of her own.]* I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in the train. I am so sorry, dear Cecily, if it is any disappointment to you, but I am afraid I have the prior claim.

Cecily. It would distress me more than I can tell you, dear Gwendolen, if it caused you any mental or physical anguish, but I feel bound to point out that since Ernest proposed to you he clearly has changed his mind.

Gwendolen. If the poor fellow has been entrapped into any foolish promise I shall consider it my duty to rescue him at once, and with a firm hand.

Cecily. Whatever unfortunate entanglement my dear boy may have got into, I will never reproach him with it after we are married.

Gwendolen. Do you allude to me, Miss Cardew, as an entanglement? You are presumptuous. On an occasion of this kind it becomes more than a moral duty to speak one's mind. It becomes a pleasure.

Cecily. Do you suggest, Miss Fairfax, that I entrapped Ernest into an engagement? How dare you? This is no time for wearing the shallow mask of manners. When I see a spade I call it a spade.

Gwendolen. I am glad to say that I have never seen a spade. It is obvious that our social spheres have been widely different.

They freeze

SCENE 11 (Bedroom)

Oscar And now I am going to you, my darling child, the tale of THE REMARKABLE ROCKET.

The King's son was going to be married, so there were general rejoicings. He had waited a whole year for his bride, and at last she had arrived. She was a Russian Princess, and had driven all the way from Finland in a sledge drawn by six reindeer. At the gate of the Castle the Prince was waiting to receive her. He had dreamy violet eyes, and his hair was like fine gold. When he saw her he sank upon one knee, and kissed her hand.

"Your picture was beautiful," he murmured, "but you are more beautiful than your picture"; and the little Princess blushed.

"She was like a white rose before," said a young Page to his neighbour, "but she is like a red rose now"; and the whole Court was delighted and the King gave orders that the Page's salary was to be doubled. As he received no salary at all this was not of much use to him, but it was considered a great honour, and was duly published in the Court Gazette.

The climax of the magnificent wedding ceremony was to be a grand display of fireworks, to be let off exactly at midnight. (The little Princess had never seen a firework in her life.) Well, the Prince and Princess were leading the dance. Then ten o'clock struck, and then eleven, and then twelve, and at the last stroke of midnight every one came out on the terrace. "Let the fireworks begin," said the King. It was certainly a magnificent display.

Whizz! Whizz! went the Catherine Wheel, as she spun round and round. Boom! Boom! went the Roman Candle. "Good-bye," cried the Fire-balloon, as he soared away, dropping tiny blue sparks. Bang! Bang! answered the Crackers, who were enjoying themselves immensely.

Every one, in fact, was a great success with the singular exception of the Remarkable Rocket. He was so damp (with crying) that he could not go off at all. So he sank deep into the mud, and began to think about the loneliness of genius.

The next day two little boys in white smocks came running down the bank. "Hallo!" cried one of the boys, "look at this old stick! I wonder how it came here"; and he picked the rocket out of the ditch.

"OLD Stick!" said the Rocket, "impossible! GOLD Stick, that is what he said. Gold Stick is very complimentary. In fact, he mistakes me for one of the Court dignitaries!"

"Let us put it into the fire!" said the other boy, "it will help to boil the kettle."

"This is magnificent," cried the Rocket, "they are going to let me off in broad day-light, so that every one can see me."

The Rocket was very damp, so he took a long time to burn. At last, however, the fire caught him.

"Now I am going off!" he cried, and he made himself very stiff and straight. "I know I shall go much higher than the stars, much higher than the moon, much higher than the sun. In fact, I shall go so high that—"

Fizz! Fizz! Fizz! and he went straight up into the air.

Delightful!" he cried, "I shall go on like this for ever. What a success I am!"

But nobody saw him. Then he began to feel a curious tingling sensation all over him.

"Now I am going to explode," he cried. "I shall set the whole world on fire, and make such a noise that nobody will talk about anything else for a whole year." And he certainly did explode. Bang! Bang! Bang! went the gunpowder. There was no doubt about it.

But nobody heard him, not even the two little boys, for they were sound asleep.

Then all that was left of him was the stick, and this fell down on the back of a Goose who was taking a walk by the side of the ditch.

"Good heavens!" cried the Goose. "It is going to rain sticks"; and she rushed into the water.

"I knew I should create a great sensation," gasped the Rocket, and he went out. *Oscar's tiptoes out as if not to awaken to sleeping child*

SCENE 12a (Basement)

Jack. This ghastly state of things is what you call Bunburying, I suppose?

Algernon. Yes, and a perfectly wonderful Bunbury it is. The most wonderful Bunbury I have ever had in my life.

Jack. Well, you've no right whatsoever to Bunbury here.

Algernon. That is absurd. One has a right to Bunbury anywhere one chooses. Every serious Bunburyist knows that.

Jack. Serious Bunburyist! Good heavens!

Algernon. Well, one must be serious about something, if one wants to have any amusement in life. I happen to be serious about Bunburying. What on earth you are serious about I haven't got the remotest idea. About everything, I should fancy. You have such an absolutely trivial nature.

Jack. Well, the only small satisfaction I have in the whole of this wretched business is that your friend Bunbury is quite exploded. You won't be able to run down to the country quite so often as you used to do, dear Algy. And a very good thing too.

Algernon. Your brother is a little off colour, isn't he, dear Jack? Now that he has succumbed in Paris to the effects of severe chill, you won't be able to disappear to London quite so frequently as your wicked custom was. And not a bad thing either.

Jack. As for your conduct towards Miss Cardew, I must say that your taking in a sweet, simple, innocent girl like that is quite inexcusable. To say nothing of the fact that she is my ward.

Algernon. I can see no possible defence at all for your deceiving a brilliant, clever, thoroughly experienced young lady like Miss Fairfax. To say nothing of the fact that she is my cousin.

Jack. I wanted to be engaged to Gwendolen, that is all. I love her.

Algernon. Well, I simply wanted to be engaged to Cecily. I adore her.

Jack. There is certainly no chance of your marrying Miss Cardew.

Algernon. I don't think there is much likelihood, Jack, of you and Miss Fairfax being united.

Jack. Well, that is no business of yours.

SCENE 12B (Basement)

Dorian So you think that it is only God who sees the soul, Basil? Draw that curtain back, and you will see mine.

Basil You are mad, Dorian, or playing a part.

Dorian You won't? Then I must do it myself.

Basil What does this mean

Dorian Years ago, when I was a boy you met me, flattered me, and taught me to be vain of my good looks. One day you introduced me to a friend of yours, who explained to me the wonder of youth, and you finished a portrait of me that revealed to me the wonder of beauty. In a mad moment that, even now, I don't know whether I regret or not, I made a wish, perhaps you would call it a prayer...."

Basil I remember it! Oh, how well I remember it! No! the thing is impossible. The room is damp. Mildew has got into the canvas. The paints I used had some wretched mineral poison in them. I tell you the thing is impossible.

Dorian What is impossible?

Basil You told me you had destroyed it.

Dorian I was wrong. It has destroyed me.

Basil I don't believe it is my picture.

Dorian Can't you see your ideal in it?

Basil There was nothing evil in it, nothing shameful. You were to me such an ideal as I shall never meet again. This is the face of a satyr.

Dorian It is the face of my soul.

Basil Christ! what a thing I must have worshipped! It has the eyes of a devil.

Dorian Each of us has heaven and hell in him, Basil.

Basil My God! If it is true, and this is what you have done with your life, why, you must be worse even than those who talk against you fancy you to be. Good God, Dorian, what a lesson! What an awful lesson! The prayer of your pride has been answered. The prayer of your repentance will be answered also. I worshipped you too much. I am punished for it. You worshipped yourself too much. We are both punished. Pray, Dorian, pray.

SCENE 12C (Basement)

Mrs. Erlynne. I am here, Lord Windermere, to bid good-bye to my dear daughter, of course. Oh, don't imagine I am going to have a pathetic scene with her, weep on her neck and tell her who I am, and all that kind of thing. I have no ambition to play the part of a mother. Only once in my life have I known a mother's feelings. That was last night. They were terrible—they made me suffer—they made me suffer too much. For twenty years, as you say, I have lived childless,—I want to live childless still. [Hiding her feelings with a trivial laugh.] Besides, my dear Windermere, how on earth could I pose as a mother with a grown-up daughter? Margaret is twenty-one, and I have never admitted that I am more than twenty-nine, or thirty at the most. Twenty-nine when there are pink shades, thirty when there are not. So you see what difficulties it would involve. No, as far as I am concerned, let your wife cherish the memory of this dead, stainless mother. Why should I interfere with her illusions? I find it hard enough to keep my own. I lost one illusion last night. I thought I had no heart. I find I have, and a heart doesn't suit me, Windermere. Somehow it doesn't go with modern dress. It makes one look old. [Takes up hand-mirror from table and looks into it.] And it spoils one's career at critical moments.

I suppose, Windermere, you would like me to retire into a convent, or become a hospital nurse, or something of that kind, as people do in silly modern novels. That is stupid of you, Arthur; in real life we don't do such things—not as long as we have any good looks left, at any rate. No—what consoles one nowadays is not repentance, but pleasure. Repentance is quite out of date. And besides, if a woman really repents, she has to go to a bad dressmaker, otherwise no one believes in her. And nothing in the world would induce me to do that.